

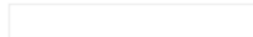


(U) Perception vs Reality During a TDY to Baghdad

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Yesterday the author described the deployment of a prototype collection system to Baghdad. In today's article, he discusses NSA's interaction with the customers and describes the situation on the ground. (S//SI)

(S//SI) One of the most fascinating discoveries you'll make during a deployment to Iraq (in addition to a new multiplexed communications signal) is discovering the difference between perception and reality. During my first visit to Iraq, the perception by the 1st Cavalry Division was that NSA was more of a hindrance than a provider. However, during my last visit that perception was mostly changed, due in large part to the implementation of the Cryptologic Support Team (CST) at the Division level.



(S//SI) Traffic control -- M1A1 style. View from the top of the SIGINT collection site at Camp Patriot in eastern Baghdad. Elements from the 1st Brigade Combat Team (1st Cavalry Division) are enroute to support a major offensive operation in Sadr City.

(S//SI) The CST, comprised of NSA service members, alleviates much of the previous frustration by giving the 1st Cavalry Division a single point of contact for all NSA issues, literally at arms reach. Additionally, we at NSA must remember that every person we send forward is a representative of the entire agency, and perceptions are formed based on each person's performance -- either good or bad.

(S//SI) Another perception that changes when you deploy is that of what is actually happening in Iraq. There is a huge difference between seeing the aftermath of a Vehicle-Borne IED (VBIED) on CNN and feeling the concussion of that VBIED in your own chest, talking to the soldiers that were wounded in action, and attending a memorial service for a soldier that bravely gave his life for his comrades. Iraq is still a very dangerous place where our brothers and sisters in arms are making the ultimate sacrifice on a daily basis; but the sense of hopelessness that we sometimes sense from the news media is not there.

(S//SI) Our service members in Iraq are motivated, they believe in their mission, they understand its importance, and they know they will come out victorious. When you meet and get to know the soldiers you are supporting it increases your sense of urgency. Not your urgency to see who can be the first one out of the parking lot at 1530, but your urgency to figure out what else you can do that might save a life.

(U//FOUO) For more information on CSTs, see the article [Supporting the Tactical Units](#).

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